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RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1877
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1864
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1801
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1899
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1866
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1755
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1902
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1558
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1574
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SUBJECT: TAJIK ELECTION NUMBERS SHOW SURPRISING REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

CLASSIFIED BY: Tracey Jacobson, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy
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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Rahmonov's re-election to a third term November 6 indicates his genuine popularity among Tajiks and reflects the people's recognition that Rahmonov's years as president have coincided with a period of relative stability in the country. Many in fact were surprised Rahmonov did not win by an even larger majority and some are already speculating that the government ordered the official figures to be decreased. Voting tallies in various regions show surprising variations. Regions that previously did not support Rahmonov turned out in force to re-elect him. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) During election day November 6, one resident in Garm emphatically noted to EmbOff a sentiment shared by many in Tajikistan, "This is a vote for peace, not for Rahmonov." The people of Tajikistan, with vivid civil war memories, greatly cherish stability and security, which they associate with Rahmonov's term in office. Some voters noted that even if a legitimate opposition candidate ran, they would still vote for Rahmonov for stability's sake. The Party of Economic Reforms picked up the second greatest number of votes with 6.2 percent, although far behind Rahmonov. The party's showing signals the Tajik people's second priority - the need for economic reform. In the ninth-poorest country in the world, where high unemployment forces hundred of thousands abroad for work, economic development is a priority for the people. Rahmonov also made economic growth a campaign promise.

REVISING THE NUMBERS- DOWN?

¶3. (C) Based on EmbOff observers' sampling throughout

Tajikistan, Rahmonov's popularity at various polling stations extended well beyond the 79.3 percent the Central Commission on Elections and Referenda announced he won. At some stations he won nearly 100% of the vote. Speculation is already rampant among international observers and analysts that Rahmonov's lower than expected 79.3 percent was falsified downward. After facing strong allegations from international organization for fixing his unbelievable 96 percent win in 1999, and encouraged to hold a free and fair election this time around, the administration may have been concerned about assuaging international observers' concerns. The MFA's Ismatullo Nasredinov, Head of the Department of European and American States remarked to Pol/Econ Chief that the winning total was incredibly low, compared to other years. "I cannot believe so many people support other candidates!" he marveled. The 79.6 percent showing was close to the 80 percent predicted in some pre-election opinion polls.

14. (C) Tajikistan's election law required each candidate to obtain signatures from at least five percent of registered voters in order to secure his nomination. Since Rahmonov faced four challengers, they nominally would have collected nominating signatures from 20 percent of the voters. If Rahmonov had won more than 80 percent of the vote, it would have looked suspicious and implied the signatures collected were falsified. Opposition political parties and observers have alleged that this is indeed the case. Iskandarov's Democratic Party of Tajikistan's deputy chairman showed PolOff signatures that were intended for the Democratic Party's rival Vatan faction. The misaddressed envelope included pages of voters' signatures supporting a presidential candidate, but no candidate's name or party affiliation appeared on any of the pages. They simply were pre-signed petitions, ready for any candidate.

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SURPRISING REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

15. (SBU) Rahmonov's popularity reaches throughout the country. Initial results from the regions showed surprising differences that may indicate a change in attitude towards the present administration. According to official statistics voter turnout was highest in Gorno-Badakshan, reaching over 95 percent; 88 percent of voters there supported Rahmonov, the highest in the country. Remote Gorno-Badakshan is home to the Pamiri ethnic group, an strong component of the opposition during the civil war. With high unemployment, and a strong separate Pamiri identity distinct from Tajiks, conventional wisdom would have predicted that Pamiris would vote otherwise. High government subsidies to the region could explain its allegiance to the central government.

16. (SBU) The number of supporters for Rahmonov in the northern Sughd region (79.4) was higher than in the Rahmonov's native southern region of Khatlon (77.6). Embassy sources say Central Commission for Elections and Referenda officials in Sughd revealed they received instructions to lower the numbers, inferring that even more people had in fact voted for Rahmonov. Given the region's history, the high level of support for Rahmonov reflected in official numbers is surprising. The Sughd region includes the populous Ferghana Valley and has seen comparably high levels of extremist and terrorist violence. Many Hizb ut-Tahrir and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan arrests occur in Sughd. Islam is more closely revered in Sughd than the rest of the country. Sughd's high support for Rahmonov bucked the region's past rivalry with southern Tajikistan. Prior to Rahmonov, Tajik leaders typically hailed from the north where Khujand (formerly Leninabad) was the former seat of real power. There is resentment among northerners towards the southern clans that have usurped that power. Sughd region locals also see themselves as the intellectuals of the country, whereas they often consider southerners simple country bumpkins. (Note: For example, northerners sometimes point out derisively that Rahmonov was the head of a cotton farm collective before becoming president and has nine children.) With Sughd's relatively higher level of economic development, Sughd officials often view themselves as more entrepreneurial than the rest of

the nation and complain that Dushanbe and the south enjoy more funds and economic assistance than the north. (Note: During the Soviet period, investment trends were the opposite.)

¶17. (SBU) In Khatlon, Tajikistan's southern region bordering Afghanistan where the president's hometown of Danghara is located, the president's popularity totaled only 77.6 percent, the lowest of all the districts. EmbOffs visited some polling stations where Communist Party candidate Talbakov appeared to be more popular than Rahmonov. In one town outside of Moskovsky, a cotton farmer told EmbOff that the majority of farmers on his cotton farm would vote for the Communist Party. This reflected the economic woes many Tajik cotton farmers face. During the Soviet times with government subsidies, farmers were better off financially than they are now. Now, saddled with debt, they face a dilapidated infrastructure and a bleak economic future as cotton farms fail to fulfill production quotas year after year. Embassy sources say that although the south appears to be a presidential stronghold on paper, in actual fact, it may not be.

¶18. (U) Campaigning for Rahmonov was heavy in Kulob with campaign "agitators" going door to door to encourage voters to come out and cast their ballot for the incumbent president. EmbOffs also saw a group of 20-30 women parading down the streets with tambourines, singing and dancing, proud to vote for Rahmonov and proud to be able to vote at all.

¶19. (U) The consistent mood across many regions was generally

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festive and cheerful. The Tajik people were proud to exercise their democratic right to vote. Many were "so happy to vote, they voted two and three times," relayed Embassy local staff.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT: Whether or not Rahmonov's administration rigged the votes downward, the numbers still show his popularity across the board. Voters' high turnout and heartfelt enthusiasm are a promising sign that democracy is indeed appreciated and welcomed in Tajikistan, even when the election is more theater than competition. END COMMENT.
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